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ABSTRACT

Although the importance of writing is well recognized, it is largely neglected in the elementary curriculum because of the current emphasis on reading; to change this trend, teacher educators must influence teachers to adopt positive attitudes toward writing. They should help teachers derive satisfaction from writing experiences, demonstrate desirable teaching methods in which the learner is the prime performer, show how theory and practice are related, help teachers learn to teach language arts skills as they relate to the purpose of communication, and emphasize processes that develop divergent thinking. A seminar for graduate elementary education majors develops divergent thinking through "invention process" activities in which students consider a familiar concept or story in a new way. After an oral exchange of ideas about the many ways of viewing a familiar storybook character, students rewrite the story in various styles, experimenting with writing techniques and vocabulary. They thus learn that creative thinking and synthesis are related processes, and they learn several important language arts generalizations with implications for teaching. (Excerpts from students' versions of "Little Red Riding Hood," written in a variety of styles, including biblical, Shakespearean, and poetic, are included.) (GT)

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STIMULATING CREATIVE WRITTEN COMMUNICATION THROUGH DIVERGENT THINKING PROCESSES

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In a recent publication, Classroom-Relevant Research in the Language Arts (1978), Gentry points out that the amount of reported research concerning the topic of written communication during 1970-1974 is considerably less than that concerning the topic of reading. In the January 1976 issue of Language Arts (Sheldon, et. al., 1976) a survey of research studies reported that forty percent of the studies conducted investigated the topic of reading, while there were no reports of studies regarding written communication. The lack of research studies apparently does not indicate that elementary school children are successful in written communication. On the contrary, a report by the National Assessment of Educational Progress noted by Porter (1972) showed that no group of nine year olds had mastered the basic convention of writing; that only the best thirteen year olds had; and that, by age seventeen, only fifty percent could put together simple sentences and express simple ideas.

Writing is largely neglected because of the current emphasis on reading. We train reading specialists but, to my knowledge, nowhere do we train remedial writing specialists. Yet, the importance of writing cannot be denied. The National Council of Teachers of English holds that writing is an important medium for self expression, for communication, and for the discovery of

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meaning -- its need is increased rather than decreased by the development of new media for mass communication (1975). The importance of this skill is stated aptly by Riemer (1969:702): "The student's organized (written) expression must be the goal of his education, for truly his expression is his knowledge. A nation makes its mark in history not through its readers but through its writers." Corbin says, "Writing is, indeed the capstone of the communication process" (1966:16).

Teachers think written communication is important, but they admittedly spend more time in teaching children to read than they do in teaching children to excel in written communication. How does one bring about the needed change in the direction of efforts? Those who educate teachers must influence teachers to adopt positive attitudes and appreciations for the production of written communication. First, teachers themselves must derive satisfaction and success in their own writing experiences, then they will in turn bring to their students the enthusiasm and eagerness for written expression. This is accomplished by demonstrating to teachers how imagination can be ignited for communication that is correct, effective and creative. They must experience pleasing results in their own written expression then they will more successfully inspire others. Professors in teacher education should demonstrate desirable teaching methods because they are likely to be imitated by students, particularly when their students are treated in the same way in which they are supposed to treat their pupils. Studies show that direct involvement in the teaching role to be learned produces this teaching behavior more effectively than

do experiences such as lectures on instructional theory (Peck and Tucker, 1973). The Education student should be cast in the role of his prospective young learner while the professor demonstrates the desirable teaching role to be learned. In general, teacher education could be more effective in changing educational practices if logically consistent relationships between theory and practice were demonstrated (Brown, 1968). Professors of education who show how theory and practice are related help students to learn both more readily.

This article will highlight fundamental concepts of language arts instruction and show how these concepts are demonstrated in a course entitled Seminar in Language Arts. The students are Graduate Elementary Education majors most of whom are currently teaching in Elementary schools.

Curriculum concepts and instructional practices

It is necessary to begin by presenting important curriculum and teaching concepts relevant to written communication. One must establish that language arts are tools of communication, not subjects in themselves; they have no body of content. One does not read reading or spell spelling. One reads because he wants to obtain a message from a printed page; one spells correctly because he wishes to make communication clear by utilizing those arbitrary written symbols agreed upon by our society. One does not write writing; he writes because he wishes to convey a message or idea by symbols (Smith, 1972). This fundamental curriculum concept has implication for teaching. When one is teaching the language arts one is teaching communication; correct, clear, and effective

communication. One should teach the skills of reading, writing, listening, spelling, and speaking as they are related to the purpose of communication, not as isolated skills or as subjects in themselves. Learners must be shown that what they are engaged in is the process of communication, and that in order to do this effectively, they need to learn the accepted use of symbols. This may lead to the accomplishment of two valuable affective goals:

(1) to encourage the learner to want to communicate and,

(2) to encourage the learner to appreciate effective communication.

Teaching approaches must be utilized which provide the impetus for the learner to be able to recognize the need for effective communication and the stimuli for motivating him to want to communicate effectively. These teaching approaches will develop when teachers adopt newer role concepts of teaching. At this time teachers are still the prime performers in classrooms, but they can assume roles in which the learner is the prime performer. These are the roles of motivator, mediator, manager, experimenter, diagnostician, counselor, evaluator, researcher, supervisor, and scholar (Hunkins, 1972). The process of effecting role change may begin with the teacher educator (Kinzer, 1972). This implies that in the task of preparing teachers to alter existing systems, teacher educators must provide a model for prospective teachers by an identity which would be characterized by what some term "process-orientation." A particular process which should be utilized in language arts education is that which develops divergent thinking. Divergent thinking must be emphasized if we are to

develop the ability to communicate effectively. It is through this process that originality comes about (Guilford, 1954). Through this process learners use their knowledge to develop new and interesting patterns of speaking, writing, and expressing themselves (Smith, 1972). There is evidence that positive attitudes for divergent-inquiry are adopted by prospective teachers who have been engaged in the process-approach in methods instruction (Duck, 1974). Techniques which develop the divergent thinking process are the significant instructional approaches used in the seminar which is described in this article. Directly related to those approaches is the concept that language arts are tools of communication. These are the bases through which newer teaching role concepts may emerge in teaching language arts, generally, and in the teaching of written communication, specifically.

The process

Some of the particular techniques utilized in the seminar shall be described. At the beginning of the semester activities which develop divergent thinking are practiced through involvement with the "invention process." The "invention process" activities are found in Synectics Education Systems' publication entitled, Strange and Familiar (1972). These activities ask the student to consider a familiar concept in a strange or unfamiliar way. Students are asked to use metaphors as aids in stimulating imagination with questions such as: "Which is thinner -- day or night?" "What might the phrase 'exact disorder' describe?" This latter

phrase is called a compressed conflict. The students also try inventing original compressed conflicts; that is, two words or ideas in conflict with each other. They challenge one another to think of what these conflicts might describe. Oral activities such as these serve as initiatory experiences in divergent thinking and as vehicles for the communication of ideas from student to student. Students are the prime performers in the classroom while the impetus for communication is provided by the professor. Through this activity an important instructional practice is demonstrated, namely that learners need stimulants and frameworks with which to exercise imagination. A stimulant may be a familiar story and a framework may be a new way for telling that story. Literature has always provided a good starting point for imaginative writing. Sixth graders, for example, created a new character; Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs became eight as Wiggley joined the story (Fisher and Terry, 1977). To illustrate this technique the professor presents the familiar story Little Red Riding Hood. The students are asked to create the framework, that is, a new way of rewriting the story. They are now applying the invention process namely, considering a familiar concept in a strange way. They begin by placing the familiar character in many settings and they suggest many ways to retell the tale. (At this point it is important to mertion that fairy tales and folk tales have been written in satirical style many times in humorous literature. The idea is not unique. What is important is that it serves to illustrate the development of creative thinking, as well as a style of teaching which is characterized by oral discussion as a prewriting

activity. It serves as a springboard for learning numerous curriculum and teaching concepts presented in this seminar.) Through this activity the students learn that creative thinking involves the process of combining things in a new way. This is the process of synthesis which, according to Bloom, is the function which requires the use of skills which lead to the production of a unique communication (1956). The students learn that creative thinking and synthesis are related processes; they learn how they may engage elementary pupils in this process. They also realize that a diverse group of learners may respond to a single stimulant according to their own abilities and interests, thus individual differences are taken into account. Concommitantly, several other important language arts generalizations with implications for teaching are highlighted. These are the following:

(1) The fundamental cognitive objective of a language arts program is to develop relevant, correct, clear, imaginative and effective communication.

(2) There is little about language that is rigid; its purpose is to communicate effectively; language is continually changing.

(3) Language is not determined by experts, but by common usage; vocabularies within a language come into usage in any given society as they arise from the experiences of the people.

(4) Each person has many vocabularies; reading, speaking, writing, and listening.

After the initial oral exchange of ideas regarding the many ways of viewing the familiar storybook character and the many settings in which it could be placed, the class is presented a typical paragraph from the story which will be used as the point from which to rewrite:

> "Once upon a time there was a young girl who lived with her mother in a cottage at the edge of the wood. The girl was given a red riding cape. Because she always wore her red cape, everyone called her "Little Red Riding Hood."

The professor may begin the discussion for creating a framework by suggesting that they try writing in Biblical style. This opens a discussion which prompts the students to inquire about the many styles of writing and about the many translations involved in the production of the Bible. The professor asks that they describe the manner in which the tale would be told in a contemporary newspaper. Lengthy discussions ensue regarding the many styles of journalism, the many types of newspapers and the many purposes of reporting. Invariably this leads to inquiry regarding propaganda techniques. After much oral discussion several examples are written. Then the class examines the reports for techniques such as loaded words, figurative and literal meanings, falsehoods that distract, illogical statements used to give the best or worst possible case for an idea, glittering generalities, and other relevant techniques or propaganda. Some experiment with these techniques and rewrite the reports to change the existing bias to a different bias. Discussion on style continues. Contemporary slang is introduced and it is discovered that "hip" vocabulary has many levels such as that which is used by mass media, that which is used by college students, that which is used by musicians, and that which may be used by society's deviant groups. Vocabulary lists are drawn and words are placed in several categories of "hip" language.

Experimentation with vocabulary continues and discussions lead to writing in a variety of styles. Some write in Shakespearean or

early Romantic; others write sonnets. Some write scripts for elementary children; some write detective stories. Others write courtroom transcripts as if it had been a trial; others write poetry. Those interested in foreign language and cultures tell it through dialects or through the use of words associated with foreign vocabularies. They learn that one stimulant is sufficient for endless frameworks. One idea is utilized for discovering many generalizations about written communication. Divergent thinking processes are stressed and critical thinking is involved in the experiences.

Summary

What has been described is one example of a process-orientation approach in the teaching of language arts. Curriculum and teaching concepts are introduced through student involvement. Students are engaged in oral discussion as prewriting activities and they are stimulated to practice the skill of written communication. Results are satisfying and pleasing. Positive attitudes towards the teaching of the skills of writing are adopted. The students learn the relationship between the skills of language arts and the function of communication. A combination of teaching roles is demonstrated while students are the prime performers. Students are engaged in the exchange of ideas which are prompted by divergent processes. The intended outcome is that students in language arts education will internalize desirable teaching roles and utilize these curriculum concepts and teaching practices in order to promote the appreciation and desire for effective, imaginative writing.

Samples

The following are excerpts from students' products:

Biblical:

"And it came to pass there was a small, female child and all who came into her presence liked her. In particular, her Grandmother. And she presented unto the child a cloak of red hue and she did wear the cloak and thus, was called 'Red Riding Hood.'"

Political Propaganda:

"Comrades! Recently we witnessed the unprovoked and political attack upon a diligent worker in the performance of her political duties. This transgression occurred when a Party worker, distinguished in her Party uniform, was deliberately and cunningly assaulted by a Capitalistic leech, attempting to rob this defenseless young worker of her possessions. With the clear thinking of her well-trained Party mind, she was able to maneuver this exploiter of society into the hands of her fellow comrades..."

Small Community News:

"This small fishing hamlet was shocked this morning by the grisly news of the brutal slaying of two women..."

Scandal Sheet:

"The sexy lady in red was walking to the little house in the woods to visit her grandmother who was a very wealthy and proper lady. She was dressed like a fox and the way she looked, she could be bait for anyone's hook. As she neared her grandmother's house she saw flashing lights and heard loud music! The sexy lady entered by a back entrance and was promptly grabbed by rough hands, harshly kissed on the mouth, and dragged over the stairs..."

Romantic:

"The child clad in her red coat ventured through the woods to visit her ailing Grandmother to bring some nourishment. During her journey she encountered a sly fox..."

Shakespearean Play:

R E D R I D I N G H O O D, T H E L I T T L E

(The servant speaks as he enters the room.)

SERVANT

Pardon -- your carriage waits without, my lady.

(The maiden casts her eyes upon him.)

RED RIDING HOOD

Dismiss it. I wilst stroll this day.

(The servant leaves.)

(Later in the script)

WOLF

Ah, this I dream'd of.

RED RIDING HOOD

Men! Men! They delight in conquering. I grieve.

WOLF

Think not of them. Thou art mine alone!

RED RIDING HOOD

Et tu, Wolf!

WOLF

Come my mortal wretch. Be not afraid. You are a finished lady.

RED RIDING HOOD

I hear the gods.

(Wolf attacks.)

WOLF

Maiden, thou knowest best. I am an honourable murderer. I must chew upon beauty.

(Red Riding Hood sleeps. The gods weep.)

Courtroom Transcript:

Red Riding Hood's mother, Sworn.

Direct examination by Albert Fairy Tale, Esquire.

Q Are you the mother of Red Riding Hood?

A Yes, I am.

Q How did your daughter pick up the name Red Riding Hood?

A Well, her grandmother gave her a red velvet coat. My daughter likes it so much that she would never wear anything else. Soon, everyone was calling her Red Riding Hood.

Q Did you send Red Riding Hood to her grandmother's residence on the day in question?

Poetry: (Two versions)

(1) Little Red Riding Hood all dressed in red,
Listened attentively as her mother said,
"Go straight to grandma's; do not tarry or speak,
To any friendly strangers that you may meet."

So, Little Red happily went,
On this sacred mission which she was sent.
No worries at all; or so she did think
Until her brown eyes caught the stranger's wink.

(2) "Where are you off to, my dear?"
Said a wolf with a gluttonous leer.
"To my grandmother's house," Red replied,
As the wolf her basket he eyed.

"Go down this path, it is quicker,"
The old wolf said to trick her.
So down the new path Red dallied,
As the wolf to the woman's house rallied.

Foreign Flavors:

(1) "In an old flat in Paris overlooking the Seine, lived a sweet, innocent child called Riding Hood Rouge. One day Rouge's mother asked if she would carry a basket of goodies ... a few crepe suzettes, a little camembert, some Chateau Haut Brion 1961 (it was a very good year) to Grandmama, who was a star at the Follies. Rouge hopped the Metro, rode to the theatre and was about to enter the dressing room of Grandmama when she was grabbed on the arm by a stage-door wolf...."

(2) "Onze upon ze time, as zey say in Amerique, zer lived ze prettiest littel gerl ever seen. Ooh la la! Was she cute! And, because she alwez wore ze red hood, everyone called er "La Petite Rougie," or as zey say in Ingleesh, Littel Red Riding Ood. One day, ze mama de zes beautifel zing said, "Eh bien, Cherie. I ave made ze chocolat mousse for your dear Grandmama. I ear zat she as been very ill. Bring er zis basket of bon-bons...."

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